Framework for Action

Moving Community Consultation to Strategic Action

May 2004

Alberta

GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

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INTRODUCTION

Family violence and bullying are not someone else's problem. These are not problems we can keep hidden away, pretending they do not exist or do not affect all of us in one way or another. Nor is it someone else's responsibility to take action. Family violence and bullying are everyone's business. It's only through concerted, deliberate and consistent actions that we will be able to address the problems and achieve one simple but critically important goal – namely, a province where all families and all individuals can live their lives free of violence and abuse.

In October 2003, Premier Klein announced that addressing family violence would be a top priority. With Mrs. Colleen Klein acting as the Honorary Chair, Children's Services Minister Iris Evans took the lead and the Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying was launched.

The goal of the roundtable process was to develop a comprehensive set of recommendations for action based on broad consultations with Albertans. Over 2,000 people participated in the process through 13 regional workshops, a series of focus groups with specific individuals and groups, and a public questionnaire. The Consultation Summary Report provides an overview of the roundtable process and the wealth of ideas and solutions proposed by those who have participated in the process.

The Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying is a culmination of months of work. On May 7th, 2004, a cross-section of Albertans from communities across the province will come together to consider the outcomes of the consultations, to review this proposed Framework for Action, and most importantly, to identify the critical next steps that can and must be taken.

Clearly, from the voices we heard over the past six months, the time for province-wide action has come. Communities, agencies, individuals and families are working hard to address issues of family violence and bullying. There are many wonderful examples where good progress is being made. But sadly, there are still far too many times when children's lives are scarred by violence or bullying, when families don't know where to turn, and when community agencies struggle to provide the services and supports families need.

It's time to say forcefully that family violence and bullying have no place in Alberta society. It's time for action. And it's time to commit to one another, to the children, youth and families of Alberta, and to ourselves that Alberta will become a province free of violence and abuse.

PURPOSE

This Framework for Action builds on months of consultations undertaken as part of the roundtable process. It reflects ideas that come from best practices and successful approaches. It reflects previous reviews of issues related to family violence including the Recommendations for Action and Change developed by William Hurlburt, Q.C., Judge Walder White and the Family Violence Review Team in October 2003.*

The Framework for Action is just that – a framework. It is not intended to prescribe the specific actions that should be taken. Nor does it capture all of the detailed suggestions coming from the roundtable process. (Participants are encouraged to review the Consultation Summary Report for more information about detailed suggestions coming from the roundtable process.)

Its purpose is to set the direction, to lay the foundation and describe the essential building blocks for a comprehensive approach to family violence and bullying. At the provincial roundtable, the objective is to confirm that the building blocks are the right ones. And if they are, then the next step is to identify the critical actions that need to be taken. What are the most important things to be done first? Recognizing that this is a long-term process, how can we build and maintain momentum? How can we make sure that action is taken at every level from individuals in their own personal and working lives, to families, communities, organizations and agencies, police and the courts, and governments at all levels?

With answers to those questions, the next step is to present a completed Framework for Action to government by the fall of 2004. The Framework can then be used to guide implementation priorities and long-term planning in government and in communities across the province.

Diversity of Populations Impacted by Family Violence and Bullying

People Impacted	Diversity of Population
Community members	Marginalized/vulnerable populations
All Family members	Multi-barriered populations
Partners	Older Adults
Parents	Aboriginal communities
Siblings	Rural/isolated
Extended Family	Developmentally and physically disabled
Victims	Low-income
Women	Gays, lesbians, transgendered and bi-sexual
Children/Youth	Cultural communities
Men	Immigrants
Offenders	Mail-order brides
Abusers	Trafficked
Bullies	Sexually exploited
Service Providers/Caregivers	Homeless
	Mentally ill
	Substance abusers

* For ease of reference, this report is referred to as the Hurlburt White report in subsequent sections of this Framework.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

It is difficult to assess the full impact of family violence and bullying in society. But the evidence shows that literally thousands of Albertans are affected by family violence every year. We know that family violence crosses gender, age, income, education, religion, culture, and geography. We have no solid information on the number of children and youth affected by bullying, but we know the problem is real and affects many children and youth across the province.

People who participated in the consultations understand the seriousness and the complexity of the problem. They brought their different perspectives, experiences and ideas to the table. They listened to each other, proposed solutions, and expressed the strong view that something needs to be done – starting now.

Throughout the consultations, we heard a number of critical and consistent messages that have become the strategic areas for action in this Framework for Action and signal the kind of approach people want to see. Here are some of those important overarching messages.

- Family violence and bullying can no longer be tolerated in Alberta. If we truly want healthy families and healthy communities, we need to send a clear signal that violence against anyone, especially family members and children, is simply not acceptable.
- Family violence and bullying are everyone's concern. These issues affect all of us in one way or another and all Albertans share the responsibility for action.
- This isn't a problem we can simply hand over to government and say, "you fix this." Government has an important leadership role to play. But so do communities and community organizations, businesses and places where people work, schools and the health system, police and people who work in the justice system, social service agencies, and individuals in their own homes and neighbourhoods.
- Because the issues are complex, we need to take a comprehensive approach. That involves addressing everything from the way our society views violence to effective legislation and policies, co-ordinated community and government services and supports, and our individual actions. It also means looking at the full continuum from prevention initiatives to emergency responses when a crisis occurs as well as outreach and follow-up over the longer term.
- Better co-ordination and collaboration is essential at every level from communities to government. There was a strong call for much more than simply tinkering around the edges. People want to see fundamental change in how service providers, community agencies, multi-disciplinary teams, and government ministries work together at every level and in every area of responsibility from overall plans to responding to the needs of victims when a crisis occurs. A lot of people are working hard to address the problems of family violence and bullying but we need all of those individuals and organizations working together, sharing priorities, sharing plans, and sharing resources in order to meet common goals.
- There are no quick solutions. We need to take a long-term, comprehensive and sustainable approach. People don't want to see a bunch of "quick hits," more pilot projects, or knee jerk reactions when a crisis occurs. They know solutions will take time. And they want to see long-term commitment and sustained efforts by all those involved.

- Victims of family violence or bullying need to know where to turn for help and support. Services and supports need to be accessible regardless of where they live and regardless of their age, sex, culture, personal or family circumstances. Once they come forward, asking for help, there has to be a co-ordinated response in place – a response that puts their needs and their family's needs first. These individuals and families need to feel safe and protected.
- People in the community said - hurting people hurt. Appropriate consequences and accountability to victims are essential. Counselling and treatment are essential to heal the emotional scars of being victimized. There is also a strong need to establish court-mandated assessment, treatment and follow-up services for perpetrators of family violence and bullying that help break the cycle of violence and support the healing process.
- While there are some parallels with the needs of Aboriginal people and communities, Aboriginal people have said there needs to be a separate response and separate strategies for addressing family violence in Aboriginal communities. Those strategies have to come from Aboriginal people themselves with strong leadership from Aboriginal leaders, Elders, communities, and individuals. And they need to be supported by governments at all levels through appropriate legislation and long-term sustainable funding and resources.

MOVING TO ACTION

Objectives

It is important to begin with a clear statement of what we are trying to achieve with this Framework for Action. Based on the consultations, it's clear that the Framework for Action must:

- Build a common vision of a province free of family violence and bullying;
- Ensure ongoing and meaningful involvement with the Alberta public to change societal attitudes and stop family violence and bullying;
- Ensure a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach at all levels including governments and communities;
- Ensure supports and services are designed, delivered and evaluated at a community level, with a broad range of people involved, to better identify and address the unique needs, strengths and diversity within communities;
- Ensure access to family violence and bullying supports and services for all children, youth, family members and people that need them, so they can be safe in their homes, schools and communities;
- Ensure those directly impacted by family violence and bullying are treated with respect and dignity and are directly involved in the decisions that affect them;
- Ensure that there are appropriate and meaningful consequences for family violence and bullying behaviours that reinforce accountability and support positive change for individuals, families and communities;
- Ensure all supports and services are accountable for improving outcomes for the individuals, families and communities impacted by family violence and bullying; and
- Make the best use of all available resources, human and fiscal, across public, private and not-for-profit sectors.

Beyond those specific objectives, perhaps one of the most important objectives of this framework is to instill hope – hope that comprehensive actions will be taken as a result, hope that services and supports will be there when people need them, and hope that future generations of Albertans will be able to grow up in families and communities that are free of violence and abuse.

KEY AREAS FOR ACTION

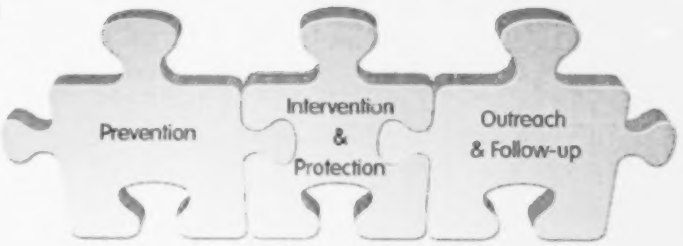
Based on the results of the consultations, the six key areas for action in this framework include:

- Social change
- Provincial leadership
- A collaborative, co-ordinated community response
- Services and supports
- Accountability
- Aboriginal communities

Continuum of Services/Supports

Key Strategies for Action

- Social change
- Provincial leadership
- A collaborative, co-ordinated community response
- Services and supports
- Accountability
- Aboriginal communities



Community Awareness
- Media/Communications
- Training and Education
- Information and Referral

Victim Services (Family focused)
- Harm Reduction
- Risk Assessment/Safety Planning
- Children Exposed
- Youth at Risk
- Assessment, Treatment & Counselling (all family members)

Community Response
- Not-for-profit Groups and Organizations
- Corporate
- Cross Sector/Multi-disciplinary
- General Public (friends, family, volunteers, neighbours, parents)

Policy/Planning

Mandated System Response
- Police
- Child Welfare
- Health Services
- Education System
- Criminal Court
- Civil Court
- Family Law
- Income Support
- Forensic
- Correctional

SOCIAL CHANGE

SOCIAL CHANGE

The message we consistently heard is that it's not good enough to just react to incidents of family violence and bullying when they occur. We need to approach this at a broader level and create an Alberta society where violence simply is not acceptable, where more is done to prevent family violence and bullying before they occur, and where we seriously address some of the factors that contribute directly to violence in our society.

Solutions

1. Change public awareness, knowledge and attitudes

Action needs to be taken to expand awareness of issues related to family violence and bullying and to change the way people think and act. Albertans need to know the facts about family violence – how pervasive it is in our society and how damaging it is to victims and perpetrators. The common stereotypes about victims of family violence and bullying need to be replaced with a better understanding of what it means to be a victim of family violence or bullying. Steps need to be taken to recognize and celebrate the diversity of our society and break down the stereotypes about individuals and groups who are seen as "different." We should also define a vision for Alberta that is free of violence.

Changing public attitudes takes time and there are many different ways of doing it. Through the consultations, there was strong support for a long-term and multi-layered social marketing campaign designed to raise awareness, promote healthy relationships, increase knowledge, and motivate individual and collective action on family violence and bullying. This could be done as part of an overall approach to promote wellness and build strong, healthy communities. The messages need to be clear and they need to "shatter the silence" on family violence. The messages need to communicate the realities and seriousness of the issues, show the impact on our society, engage a wide range of people and organizations, be targeted to various audiences including youth and diverse cultural groups, and reinforce what can and must be done.

2. Invest in our society

While the causes of family violence and bullying are complex and diverse, we know that some factors in our society contribute to the problem. Poverty, addictions, social isolation, inaccessible transportation, and low levels of education increase the likelihood of power imbalances and dependencies and make it very difficult to stop the cycle of violence and abuse. Youth can be more vulnerable to bullying when they cannot afford to participate in school activities or dress the same as their peers. Social support, including adequate income, housing, daycare, and legal support, is often key to helping victims make the transition from an unsafe situation to a healthy and safe future. More can be done to build on best practices and support research that explores the root causes of family violence and bullying.

3. Focus on prevention and education

Over the longer term, the best approach is to prevent family violence and bullying before it occurs. This involves extensive and targeted public education not only through formal curriculum in schools but by educating the entire community, including service providers. It needs to start early and continue throughout our lives. Examples of some specific suggestions for action include making changes in Alberta's elementary, junior high and high school curriculum to expand the focus on relationships, kindness, and positive parenting, teaching children and youth how to effectively deal with bullying and violence in schools, using successful prevention programs to reduce the incidence of bullying and violence, involving youth in family violence and bullying initiatives, holding workshops and providing information to doctors, churches, parents, coaches, youth workers and other community members, and encouraging workplaces to develop policies that promote healthy families.

4. Place a higher priority on early intervention

Consistently, we heard about the importance of starting early with young children and families. That involves providing parenting education and opportunities for positive parent and child interaction. It involves enhancing early childhood development programs and other initiatives designed to give children a healthy start in their lives. It involves developing programs in communities that build caring relationships, finding ways for children and families to access school and community recreation, and looking out for signs of stress in children, youth, individuals and families long before the point of crisis. It could involve innovative approaches like community caring teams, parent support lines or family resource centres.

5. Expand mentoring and community leadership

Experience shows that a good mentor – someone we can look up to or turn to for advice – is often a powerful way of helping people make positive choices. Positive mentors are especially important for young people to help them become productive, responsible adults and to break the cycle of violence and other destructive behaviours. Community leaders, organizations, faith communities, businesses and governments should expand their efforts to act as mentors and leaders in finding solutions to family violence and bullying. Older adults and Elders have a huge role to play in the mentoring of our future generations. We need community leaders to step forward as champions who can and will act as role models and speak out on family violence and bullying.

PROVINCIAL LEADERSHIP

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While all of us have an important role in addressing family violence and bullying, the provincial government has a specific leadership role to play – providing a more co-ordinated approach at the top, supporting community actions and plans, providing the necessary legislation, and shifting from current funding models to long-term, sustainable approaches that are based on solid outcomes.

Solutions

1. Establish enabling legislation

One of the clear obligations and responsibilities of government is to enact the necessary legislation to facilitate an effective response to family violence and bullying. Through the consultations, specific suggestions for changes to current legislation were made including legislative changes to enable a co-ordinated response, provide better tools for responding to family violence, and include abuse of older adults in the definition of family violence. These suggestions will be considered, along with the recommendations from the Hurlburt White Report, as part of a review of the *Protection Against Family Violence Act*.

The Hurlburt White Report specifically addressed the need for legislative changes related to family violence and recommended that all family violence legislation should be consolidated under one act – specifically, the *Protection Against Family Violence Act*. In their view, the recommended legislation should begin with a declaration of the right of every family member to be free from family violence and should outline the specific objectives for the legislation. They also suggested that legislation should facilitate co-operation and collaboration among all agencies involved in the response to family violence.

2. Maintain a long-term, sustainable commitment

Adequate resources – both human and financial – are essential to success and must be reflected in a long-term, sustainable commitment. Government should develop long-term, solution-focused plans and evaluate the effectiveness of those plans on an ongoing basis. The current approach to funding programs should be reviewed and long-term, sustainable funding should be put in place, particularly for programs with a proven record of success. Partnerships with private sector foundations and community organizations are an additional way of ensuring sustainable funding over the longer term.

3. Enhance the cross-government approach

Through the consultations, people consistently talked about the need for better co-ordination at the government level and for breaking down the silos among government ministries. Steps have been taken across government to introduce a number of important cross-ministry initiatives. However, new concepts and fundamentally different approaches need to be explored and implemented to ensure that people at all levels are working together to meet common objectives. That could include establishing a single business plan for addressing family violence and bullying with dedicated resources, clear responsibilities, and shared accountability for achieving specific goals and targets across a number of government ministries. Cross-sector training, identifying champions in different ministries, facilitating co-ordination and collaboration on the front lines, and establishing cross-ministerial agreements and enhancing information sharing protocols are all ways of improving co-ordination and collaboration across government.

4. Establish a single, cross-sector agency to take the lead

In virtually every workshop, we heard about the need for a fundamentally different way of bringing all the various partners together to address family violence and bullying. People talked about the need for some type of central planning body that is responsible for overseeing a comprehensive approach to family violence and bullying. This "single agency" should be led and established by government and should include not only a cross-section of government ministries but also community agencies and organizations involved in family violence and bullying. It should be responsible not only for overseeing a comprehensive plan but also monitoring and reporting on progress in achieving the goals of the plan and ensuring accountability.

Several options are possible for such an agency including:

- A legislated body such as a commission (similar to AADAC) or a Premier's Council (recommended in the Hurlburt White Report); or
- An enhanced cross-ministry initiative building on the current Office for the Prevention of Family Violence and the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative.

Whichever option is chosen, the key is that there must be strong leadership, a high profile, adequate resources and clear accountability to ensure that action is taken on a number of fronts across government.

A COLLABORATIVE, CO-ORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE

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It's at the community level where people access and depend on services and support. A collaborative, co-ordinated approach is essential not only to make the best use of available resources, but also to ensure that people have timely access to a full range of responsive services and supports. Communities are in the best position to do this – to bring the right people and organizations to the table for planning, developing and delivering services and supports that make sense within their unique community needs and capacities.

Solutions

1. Establish a collaborative, co-ordinated community model

Communities will vary in how they respond to family violence and bullying. But it is important that the appropriate systems and structures be established so community agencies can easily come together to support families and individuals affected by family violence and bullying. Community-level action plans should be in place with clear steps that specify where to report violence, what is to be done with perpetrators, consequences and accountability, services and supports for victims, and long-term counselling for both victims and perpetrators. As part of these co-ordinated plans, consistent assessment tools, standards and protocols, shared resources and joint evaluation should be in place. Leadership will be needed from the full range of community partners in order for this to work effectively.

2. Provide support for collaboration

Collaborative approaches take time and the necessary support and resources must be in place for this to happen. That includes adequate funding and funding models that encourage collaboration rather than competition among service providers. It means facilitating the development of local or regional inter-agency coalitions that can share available resources and deliver a more co-ordinated approach. It means service providers at the front-line work together to address people's needs and solve problems. Regional governance agreements could be considered (i.e. Family and Community Support Services boards, regional/municipal policing authorities, regional health authorities, Child and Family Services Authorities, Alberta Service Centres, delegated First Nations Authorities, and potentially others) to co-ordinate community-based services across regions.

3. Establish long-term, sustainable community solutions

Communities are looking for long-term solutions not a series of continual changes with new pilot projects or demonstration projects. Long-term funding should be in place for programs and initiatives that work. Effective funding models should balance the need to maintain successful approaches, adapt programs when necessary to achieve better outcomes, and try new and innovative approaches. Communities, businesses and governments should work together as partners to find ways to jointly support and fund effective programs that can be sustained over the long term.

4. Expand the use of multi-disciplinary teams

When people need services and supports, the focus should be on what the person needs not on who can provide it. With multi-disciplinary teams (e.g. teams of social workers, police, counsellors, health care workers, etc.), a wider range of needs can be addressed through co-ordinated services within a single response. Peer support, timely critical incident debriefing and other supports for service providers through a team approach often result in a higher quality of services to those impacted by the serious issues of family violence and bullying.

5. Provide cross-sector training

All those who are involved in responding to family violence and bullying – from direct service providers to volunteers, the police, court officials, government and community leaders, people in schools and in the health care system – need comprehensive training to build common understanding and to deal effectively with these complex and sensitive issues. Many different approaches can be used to provide this type of training but they must be accredited and have a proven track record of being effective.

6. Ensure that essential information can be shared

When agencies and service providers have all the necessary information, there is a better chance they will be able to prevent family violence or respond effectively when family violence occurs. Despite work that has been done through a cross-ministry initiative on information sharing to expand training and understanding of the current legislation, people see the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPP) and the *Health Information Act* (HIA) as significant barriers to information sharing by service providers involved with individuals and families. Although many conceded it may be due to people's misunderstanding of the intent and application of these Acts, the need to examine the understanding and effectiveness of information sharing at the community level remains. The conclusion in the Hurlburt White report was that the present information-sharing regime is not effective. One option for addressing these concerns is to establish one legislative provision specific to family violence that would enable agencies to share information when there are reasonable grounds for suspicion of family violence. Other suggestions include providing additional cross-sector information sharing training on FOIPP and HIA and continuing to develop information sharing protocols and processes that can be used in communities.

A central databank that allows agencies to share best practices would allow service providers to learn from one another and build a more effective response overall.

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

People who are affected by family violence and bullying need a full range of community-based services and supports to ensure basic safety, support and healing. This also includes a strong emphasis on prevention programs to support healthier individual, family and community outcomes and reverse the high incidence of family violence and bullying.

Solutions

1. Ensure equitable access to services and supports

Equitable access has to be available to everyone regardless of their sex, age, culture, or personal circumstances. While we recognize that the full range of services cannot be provided in each and every community, innovative approaches and transportation should be available to help provide access to the services people need. Steps also should be taken to improve awareness of the services that are available in communities and how they can be accessed.

2. Establish a single point of access to services and supports

A single point of access that includes services from prevention to outreach and follow-up would help reduce the stigma of asking for help and ensure that victims of family violence or bullying get access to the services and supports they need. Some innovative options include telephone access through province-wide crisis and information lines, school access where schools can be a critical connection point to other services in the community, workplace access, co-locating agencies, or establishing family advocacy centres.

3. Enable safe reporting

Mechanisms should be in place to ensure safe and secure reporting of family violence and bullying. Youth and children, in particular, need to be encouraged to talk to a trusted friend, teacher, the police, Social Services or other service providers if they find themselves in a violent or abusive situation.

4. Provide advocates for victims

When people are affected by family violence or bullying, they need a supportive voice, someone to advocate on their behalf and help them access the supports and services they need every step of the way.

5. Expand the availability of emergency/safe housing

In times of crisis when family violence occurs, safe emergency housing should be available and accessible to women, children, youth, men, people with disabilities, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people, and older adults. This requires a variety of approaches including shelters and/or safe houses that can serve smaller numbers of populations with diverse needs as well as rural and remote communities. In addition, a perpetrator "cooling off" place was suggested so that perpetrators could access programs, services, counselling, and advice and help prevent the escalation of violence.

6. Provide transitional support

Women and men who have left relationships because of family violence need supports to help them make a successful transition and get re-established in a new way of life. Transition plans must be built on the individual strengths, needs and circumstances of the individuals involved. People often need time to get through the crisis in order to make good decisions for themselves and their families. Community responders must be proactive in providing information and support. The new Alberta Works program (formerly called Supports for Independence) should respond to the needs of victims through a combination of financial assistance, training, and other necessary supports and help them make the transition. Expanded second stage and affordable housing is also needed. This will require commitment from all levels of governments and a range of community partners, including business.

7. Provide treatment and counselling

Treatment and supports should be available to all those who are affected by family violence and bullying, including the victims, the abusers, and children who are exposed to family violence. That includes better access to counselling, treatment and follow-up in the community whenever it is needed, including during times of crisis. It also involves implementing innovative approaches to address bullying in schools and communities. It is critical to have access to assessment, treatment, rehabilitation and follow-up services for perpetrators of family violence who are mandated for such services through the criminal justice system or under the Protection of Family Violence Act. Aboriginal communities in particular expressed the need to use holistic and healing approaches that include all members of the family and the community. We must also work harder to build awareness of the issue and make it easier for victims and families to report sexual violence and access affordable treatment and counselling services necessary for their healing.

8. Ensure adequate protection services

More needs to be done to protect people who are victims of family violence and to prevent further incidents or the escalation of violence. Cross-sector family violence training that includes police and child welfare is necessary to ensure consistent and effective protection and enforcement. Different approaches could be used to enhance safety including immediate removal and appropriate surveillance of the perpetrators, consistent family violence screening and assessment tools to be used by all programs and services, family violence response teams, or a telephone number where community people and service providers can access information about how to respond. Access to emergency shelters and/or emergency accommodations needs to be facilitated in a timely and responsive manner.

9. Address concerns with custody and access disputes

Custody and access disputes are at the center of many tragic circumstances resulting from family violence. There is strong agreement that the best interests of the child should be first and foremost in any custody and access discussions, court orders, and follow-up supports. Unfortunately, the current system does not always succeed in protecting the best interests of the child. There was also strong consensus that the time for legislative reform in custody and access is now. A number of the specific recommendations included in the Hurlburt White report were reinforced in the consultation, including support for the principles of a unified Family Court. Specific suggestions include providing family violence screening in the Family Court process, providing full disclosure and co-ordination between court services and protection authorities, allowing children to be represented by a lawyer in custody and access disputes, and expanding the availability of safe places for the exchange of children and supervised visits along with the necessary training and supports.

10. Ensure that services and supports respond to those affected by family violence and bullying

We must all work to eliminate labels and stigma if we want to encourage more people to make positive changes to their situations. We must be prepared to address all incidences of family violence and bullying on a case-by-case basis, recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The focus has to be on healing and hope – on listening to and treating each victim as an individual, tailoring programs and services to meet their unique needs and circumstances, and removing barriers to services, especially in times of crisis. Culturally appropriate services are essential to effectively respond to our diverse populations in ways that will make a difference.

11. Make changes in the courts and the justice system

Both perpetrators and victims should have equitable and timely access to the justice system, from the point of intervention through the court process. Financial capacity should not negatively affect people's ability to participate in the justice system. As noted earlier, one solution may be establishing a unified Family Court approach. Other solutions could include providing legal aid for victims of family violence, building on the recommendations of the family law reform process already underway, expanding the Presiding Justice of the Peace program for providing Emergency Protection Orders, considering alternative and restorative justice approaches when appropriate, and providing family violence information and training to judges, crown prosecutors and lawyers.

ACCOUNTABILITY

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability was an important theme throughout the roundtable consultations. Governments, communities and agencies need to be accountable for the effectiveness and outcomes of the programs and supports they provide, and individuals need to be accountable for their own actions. As noted earlier, a single agency established and led by government but involving a broad cross-section of agencies and individuals involved at the community level is one way of ensuring greater accountability for an overall plan to address family violence and bullying. People feel strongly that there should be ongoing assessment of what works and what doesn't, measurable outcomes should be in place, progress should be tracked, things should be changed when they don't work and individuals should be accountable for the choices they make and the actions they take.

Solutions

1. Support evidence-based practices

Because of the seriousness of the issues and their impact on people's lives, it is important to continually evaluate what approaches and programs work and which ones do not. Funding should go to programs that produce the best results. Best practices from across the province and around the world should be explored and adopted. This must include looking at non-traditional approaches such as holistic healing and others outside of the mainstream culture. In addition, research should be used to examine the depth of family violence and bullying and to help us better understand the prevalence and scope of the problems involved.

2. Establish and track measurable outcomes

Whatever strategies and programs are put in place, it is important to set goals and targets, to establish measurable outcomes, and to continually assess the effectiveness of programs, services and supports.

3. Ensure transparency and clear reporting

Accountability is best achieved when the information provided is transparent, clear and easy to understand. More work needs to be done to reduce administration, streamline current reporting practices, introduce consistent language, and set common standards for grant applications and reporting requirements. In turn, agencies receiving funds should be expected to provide clear and consistent information about how funds were used and what results were achieved.

4. Reinforce consequences for actions and individual accountability

Individuals commit acts of violence and abuse, and those individuals should be held accountable for their actions. We have heard that, in some instances, there appear to be no consequences for violent behaviour in families while, in other environments, the very same acts are not tolerated. Family violence should be considered as serious as violence against a stranger and not a 'family matter'. Bullying can no longer be viewed as part of growing up. People who witness or suspect family violence or bullying, and do nothing about it, need to be educated about the personal responsibility to intervene and how to do that safely. Steps should be taken to give the justice system more flexibility in determining consequences for family violence and bullying, to make the public aware of the issues and consequences, and to look at alternative measures programs such as restorative justice or family mediation to keep individuals more accountable to their families and communities.

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Aboriginal people reflect many different voices and different communities across the province. Yet, despite these differences, there is a common thread in their experience of family violence and bullying. While the reasons are multifaceted and complex, many Aboriginal people point to cultural loss as a primary factor leading to family violence. Throughout the consultations with Aboriginal people, there was a strong message that Aboriginal people – elected leaders, Elders, service providers, families and communities – must develop their own strategies and solutions – solutions that reflect the needs of their communities, build on the strengths of individuals, families and communities, and reflect culture and ceremony in the basic framework. Many of the solutions can be found in restoring the traditional values of honesty, love, respect and spirituality.

Solutions

1. Build community resources and capacity

Strategies to address family violence and bullying need to start by building awareness and understanding of the impact of violence and abuse on individuals, families and communities. Traditional values, while still existent, have given way to communities where violence can be seen as the norm. A holistic approach should be taken, reflecting Aboriginal perspectives, including all family members, and building community wellness. Aboriginal communities need to work together to redefine what it means to be part of a community and how people can better support each other. Services and supports need to be in place to help build healthy and resilient children and families and to rebuild the connection to traditional parenting practices. When incidents of family violence occur, safety is the primary concern and that means effective prevention strategies, safe reporting channels, safe houses, and appropriate follow-up need to be in place.

Leadership was identified as a critical issue. Leadership is in everyone, however, it must start with the elected leaders, band council members, Elders and spiritual leaders. Steps should be taken to identify positive role models and trusted champions to bring people together around the issues of family violence and bullying. The grassroots voice of Aboriginal communities has to be rallied and involved in addressing the root causes and factors that contribute to family violence and bullying behaviours.

2. Use a holistic approach that reflects culture and tradition

Services and supports in Aboriginal communities must be designed to nurture the whole person and to include families and the community in the healing process. Treatment and healing should emphasize compassion over judgment, family healing over individual punishment, and community wholeness over division. Steps should be taken to involve the whole family in case management, to expand sentencing circles to the adult population, provide healing circles, involve Elders in the healing process, and provide long-term services until families gain strength and see hope. Steps should also be taken to establish and track measurable outcomes, identify and build on best practices, and assess the effectiveness of approaches and programs.

3. Expand education and training

All community members – from children to Elders – need education about family violence and bullying to understand why violence has increased in Aboriginal communities, how it affects individuals, families and communities, and to encourage cultural pride. Education should reinforce the fact that family violence and bullying are not a natural part of Aboriginal culture. People who work in Aboriginal communities also must be trained to understand the history, culture and root causes of violence.

4. Address stereotypes and racism

Racism and systemic abuse have taken a significant toll on Aboriginal people, on families and communities. Action must be taken to change negative attitudes that persist in mainstream society. This could be done through effective public awareness, education programs and meaningful involvement of Aboriginal people in non-Aboriginal communities.

5. Improve access to services

Aboriginal people face many barriers in accessing the services they need including physical barriers like isolation, distance from services, and lack of transportation, and more intangible barriers such as misperceptions, racism, and lack of understanding about Aboriginal culture. Remote and isolated Aboriginal communities require extra resources due to the distance from and availability of safe houses, transition centres, intervention and support. Steps should be taken to overcome those barriers through centralizing services in communities, establishing one-stop access centres or telephone crisis lines (or other emergency response devices for people who are at high risk but do not have telephones), expanding services for males, supporting urban women's shelters, expanding access to emergency/safe housing for extended families, increasing second stage housing, and providing safe visitation centres in communities.

6. Develop co-operation with non-Aboriginal communities

Aboriginal communities want ownership of their own programs and services but they want to partner with non-Aboriginal communities and service providers. Governments at all levels need to work with and support Aboriginal communities to address underlying issues such as safety, poverty, housing, and long-term community support. To be effective, these must be true partnerships, grounded in a clear understanding of Aboriginal cultures and traditions and reflecting mutual respect and honour. Expanded training and education are important to promote understanding and facilitate partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

7. Address jurisdictional issues

Jurisdictional issues can too often undermine efforts to get the necessary programs and services in place. The high incidence of family violence and bullying demands creative solutions and effective partnerships – partnerships that cut across all levels of government and help ensure safe and healthy development for children, families and communities.

NEXT STEPS

This Framework for Action is intended to lay the foundation for a comprehensive plan to address the serious issues of family violence and bullying. It reflects months of consultations and the voices of hundreds of people who participated in the process.

The key questions now are:

- Have we got it right? Does the framework cover the right strategic areas for action to meet the objectives and move us toward an Alberta free of family violence and bullying?
- If the framework is right, then what are the critical next steps that need to be taken to transform this framework into action? What needs to be done by individuals, by communities, by governments, and by all the key stakeholders to build commitment and maintain momentum? What can be done in the next 18 months? The next three years? Ten years and beyond?
- What are the major obstacles and barriers to the kind of fundamental change outlined in this Framework for Action and how can they be overcome? What opportunities are there for taking action and moving ahead?
- What can the next generation expect as a result of our commitment and efforts?

With answers to those questions, a complete Framework for Action will be developed for the provincial government by the fall of 2004. Governments and communities can then use this jointly developed Framework for Action as their guide to build long-term implementation strategies and set their immediate priorities for action.

As part of that planning and implementation process, it is clear that all the identified strategies cannot be implemented at once. Some of the specific suggestions in each of the key areas will require more time to implement. Others need to be looked at in greater detail to determine whether they are indeed the best solutions or whether more effective solutions could be developed. In other areas, actions can and must be taken as quickly as possible. Decisions on priorities, resources and specific actions must be made within communities and within government – but they should be part of an overall, consistent and sustainable approach that reflects our strong and collective commitment to making family violence and bullying a thing of the past.

While we know it will take time and change will not be easy, a commitment to action has been made. Issues of family violence and bullying are serious. They are devastating to children, to families, to individual Albertans, and to our way of life. And they have no part in Alberta's society. With a comprehensive plan in place, and the ongoing support of people across the province, we can build a province where children and families can live their lives free of violence and abuse.